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Another Half of the World That's Waking Up

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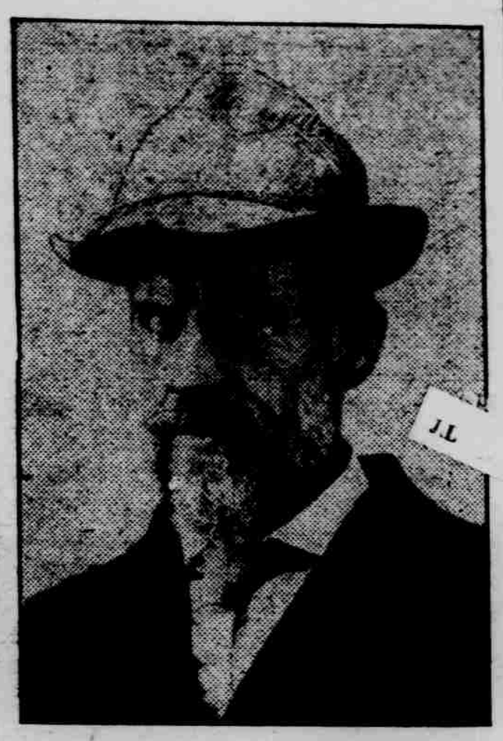

Raeford, March 8.—The other day I fell in with Fred Johnson, editor of the Hoke County Journal at Raeford, and we made an automobile voyage down through some of Hoke and Cumberland and Robeson counties to Red Springs and Fayetteville.

An automobile is an institution that does not cultivate much sociability. You make an occasional remark to the fellow who is by your side driving the machine. You watch the passing telephone poles and trees, making bets with youself as to which one you will hit first, and how many pieces you can gather up after the accident. You ask a question perkily as to who lives there, and how much that man is arranging to plan to cotton. But chiefly you work your eyes and rest your mouth.

An automobile ride gives you a chance to think and see things.

As we sailed along the new roads of this territory the continued succession of improvement called to mind Clarence Poe's book, "Where Half the World is Waking Up." With a wonderfully keen eye Poe saw in the far East what the rest of the world has overlooked, the portentous arrival of hundreds of millions of people at the gateway, which separates yesterday with its darkness from tomorrow with all of its modern possibilities. That book made a more profound impression on me than anything I have come across in a long time, both because of the suddenness and cleverness with which the author perceives the situation and of the enormous magnitude of the moving enormous multitude of the movement he tells about.

The book and its theme crowded on my thoughts as we rolled along the Fayetteville road, and I concluded some day to tell the writer of the book that the other half of the world is also waking up.

Possibly the people of the United States assume that this progressive Yankeeland has waked up. In a way that is true. From the day when Walter Raleigh's colonists sighted the coast east of the Carolina sounds, the mention of America has carried with it a sence of digging ahead. American energy and activety have been phenomenal in making a great nation on this continent, likewise in setting a pattern that all the rest of the world has followed, even the Orient at last waking up.

Yet over there on the Fayetteville road I could see that the rest of the world is waking up, and I told Johnson I would give a dollar for his chance to see this country fifty years from now.

Once in a while I meet a man from the north, the north where North Carolina twenty years ago was classified as a part of the unexplored regions, and he says to me, "You need more wide-awake northern settlers in your country."

I tell him to go out and watch what is going on in this old Scotch neighborhood.

Then I fall in with a man born and raised in this section who tells me, "We need more people from up your way with energy and ambition to make this country wake up."

I tell him to rub his eyes and look about him.

Wagram is a little town that has been getting itself on the man in the last few years. Not on very tight yet, still you can't brush it off. Why? Well, that town loads something like ten thousand bales of cotton a year on the branch road that the Aberdeen and Rockfish built down its way two or three years ago, and you can never lose a town that markets nearly three-quarters of a million dollars' worth of cotton and seed a season. A few miles up from Wagram is Raeford. Eight or ten thousand bales of cotton come to Raeford in the fall for market. Ten or a dozen miles away is Red Springs. Another town with half or three-quarters of a million dollars' worth of coton products in a season. Over the ridge to the westward is Aberdeen. A cotton buyer began operations there in the season now closing. Up at Southern Pines a cotton weighing outfit is to be established. At Vass a cotton mill has opened a market for a lot of cotton each year.

I have no idea what the total will be. Figures simply say big, and a after they get above a few thousand we realize what they mean.

But think about it. The automobile pulled up in front of the hotel at Red Springs on our journey. We fell to talking about the cotton crop. We bumped against men who harvest two hundred, two hundred and fifty, three hundred bales of cotton a year. Comissioner J. W. Johnson, of Hoke county, told me he is preparing to plant 900 acres in cotton this year.

No doubt there are bigger planters in the United States. Mere bigness does not appeal to me. Some big men are not as big as their fathers before them. I guess Johnson's father must have been a prety big man, for he has two sons down in this section that are factors in several of the big things, farms, factories, banks and things of that character. One is J. W. The other is W. J. Saves letters that way. They came here from upper Moore county, and they were not bothered much in bringing along their impediment when they came down in Cumberland county as young men. These two men led me back to my story. J. W. shower me a farm that he bought and paid thirty-five thousand dollars for.

"It was offered to me ten years ago for thirty-five hundred," he said.

"Why didn't you buy it then?" I asked, for I bite easy sometimes.

"There were two reasons, either one good enough," he answered. "I did not have the money, and I did not believe the land was worth it then."

J. W., looking out over eleven hundred acres of as handsome land as is out doors, when asked what he paid for it, said:

"Six dollars an acre when I bought the first portion, sixty-two and a half when I bought the last."

He is building on this farm a new brick house, three stories, rooms without limit, billiard room, think of it on a farm, three bath rooms, electric lights, water, telephones, hard roads to the door, and all that sort of thing that you think goes with life in town.

You will notice that the price ten years ago is one-tenth of the present price. That is the thing that struck me as a lesson from the figures.

If you get down the old arithmetic and cipher it out you see that the rate of increase has been somewhere near a hundred per cent. for each year, which is enough for the Standard Oil company.

Pretty near as creditable an awakening as is taking place in the old world, and on a broad basis, although the oriental fellows will follow every step, now that they have learned how to gauge their steps to fit American progress.

This is an agricultural awakening. For more than a century the theory of farming in America has been to till the ground while it will yield a crop, then abandon it for something else. Unluckily down in the light sandy land of the Cape Fear country the new ground did not seem very much better than the old ground, and farming was not rated highly. Then came the discovery of that old chemist, Freiherr Von Liebig, who discovered that plants grew through the nutrition they obtain from the air, and that to make satisfactory growth they need from the soil certain soluble mineral substances, which the farmer has learned how to supply.

Potash, phosphoric acid and nitrogen. These are the three and it is the discovery of those three things in the economy of plant growth that has been a principal factor in the awakening, which has taken place down in this country.

There are men living in the region round about Raeford and Red Springs who recollect when Robeson county made about a thousand bales of cotton a year. Cumberland made about the same amount. Robeson now is one of the foremost cotton counties of the United States. A dozen farmers living in Red Springs will make more cotton than both Cumberland and Robeson made in the days referred to. Half a dozen farmers of Raeford will make more.

Most of the change has come about in the last twenty years, much of it in ten. Ten years ago there was still a doubt as to whether the Rockfish country was a farming possibility. The old residents looked on the country as fit for grazing some cattle, for a little corn, hay, some wheat, rice, and things of that character, but on a small scale.

Then lumber commenced to have a value, and the turpentine and lumber crop aroused a certain energy and enthusiasm. Railroads hauled forest products to the market. Turpentine, rosin and tar, the naval stores that we found accredited to North Carolina in the geopgraphy, came from farther back in the country than Wilmington. That was good while it lasted, but it could not last. Forests do not mature their crops rapidly enough to be good farming projects.

The timber went, and the yellow mule, the Dixie plow and the 8-2-2 doctrine was preached to save the people from destruction.

Many wise men laugh at the bell-cord of the plow mule, and the absurdity of distributing two hundred pounds of 8-2-2, among ten thousand stalks that stand on an acre. And in does look like a joke.

But the joke is on the wise ones who laugh, as it has been since the wise men started that fashion by laughing at Noah and his ark scheme. Noah sailed away when the wise men were seeing the point. That little bit of fertilizer is not sufficient to make a crop of cotton, nor is the Dixie plow the best tool. Still the wheelbarrow was a horseless carriage long before the automobile came to claim that distinction, and you will notice that where you find a big motor doing business the chances are that a yellow mule has walked that way in the morning.

You can't tie a man down to a primitive idea for keeps. He tries that primitive thing, and presently he sees where he can improve on it. That's how he comes to be a man instead of the creature that Darwin says he is descended from.

These folks say that two hundred pounds of fertilizer aided the crop of cotton that was planted in the patches in a small way. Then a bold chap put out more fertilizer. He made a hit, and he grew bolder. He had the nerve to clear some more ground. Then the neighbors waded in.

It's an old story for a community that has been trying the thing out for about twenty years. They have just about arrived at the point where they believe that cotton can be made in pretty near any quantity now in Hoke, and Cumberland and Moore and upper Robeson, which has been cut off to make Hoke. And the point is that thousands of bales of cotton are coming from the farm each year, that the country is roused up, several million dollars is coming in that did not grow on cotton stalks before; homes, new school houses, new farms, new everything, including new knowledge of the world and the comfort it holds for those who will get close enough to the throes of nature to command the.

I can't measure the progress these people have made in the last twenty years. I might say fifty per cent. or five hundred or any thing in figures, but figures do not understand. Materially there has been a wonderful awakening, which has only set the pace. For bigger in importance is the consciousness that has come to this section of its gigantic possibilities, and the limitless capacities of its people.

The men here are of the world and its work and responsibilities. I sat talking with A. T. McCallum in his office in Red Springs and an incident called up one day when he and Senator McLaughlin were in the Swiss Tyrell. At Raeford I went out with T. B. Upchurch to look over some water-power and mill development projects in which he and a number of his neighbors are associated. Will Blue tells me of several hundred acres that he is farming over in Pitt county, making tobacco. Saxton, at the hardware store, is bringing in improved farm implements in car loads.

These fellows are doing things. They are seeing things. They are of the progressive universe. They are building mills and dams and factories at home, and are concerned in affairs away from home.

One day this section of North Carolina was set down as in the hopeless belt. Now it is productive. The automobile shop is on the front street, and the blacksmith shop has moved from under the spreading chestnut tree to let the fixer of gasoline buggies set new tires instead of new horse shoes.

No, not yet. They are not wholly awake here, nor anywhere else. Civilization is just breaking into life. When the human race is fully awake a grain of radium will be propelling the plows. Gravity will be neutralized so we can step from Hoke county to Raleigh, or project the material body around the world or leave it at home while the spiritual body goes visiting. All that sort of thing will happen which is now regarded as impossible, but none of us is awake enough to predict what these things will be.

The great awakening of the Orient is one of the significant events of the opening century. Yet it seems significant to me only because of the enormous mass it involves, for the awakening that is really portentous is that awakening of these people who are so far ahead of the populous east, and who are awakening to astonishing new truths in agriculture, in the knowledge of their resources, of natural forces, and, better than all else, of human power and capabilities

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The cost of feeding the average dairy cow in the United States for twelve months is $21, according to statistics gathered by one of the big dairy cattle societies. There may be cows in the herd that do not earn their keep. The Babcock tester will detect them.

If ever we are to get this stock-raising business on a firm basis where we can tell to which particular strain our animals belong every farmer must keep good sires for his own herds, and not depend on the services of his neighbors' males at breeding time.